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SUBJECT: FOOD ASSISTANCE IN NEWLY RESETTLED AREAS

REF: HARARE 2062 HARARE 2024

SUMMARY

1. The World Food Program recently wrote to the major international donors requesting their concurrence with a proposal to provide food assistance in the newly resettled areas, i.e., the former commercial farming areas that were subject to the Government of Zimbabwe's fast-track, often violent, land reform program. This request followed closely the release of a Human Rights Watch Report that criticized international donors for allegedly politicizing food assistance by not allowing distributions in newly resettled areas. Devising an effective means of providing food assistance to the most vulnerable populations in these areas, without giving support to Zimbabwe's failed land reform program, is a complex matter that raises a host of practical and policy concerns. This cable analyzes three options for responding to this sensitive issue that the mission has discussed extensively at post with the European Union and the British High Commission. Based on these discussions, this cable recommends that the USG allow the World Food Program to pilot a small food assistance effort in newly resettled areas on a trial basis, subject to a number of stringent conditions and additional assurances regarding how the program would be implemented in a transparent and non-political manner without supporting the fast-track land reform program or rewarding lawlessness. End Summary.

BACKGROUND

2. Zimbabwe is in its third year of a complex food security crisis brought about by a combination of economic mismanagement, disrupted agricultural production due to the chaotic and often violent invasions of formerly white-owned commercial farms, and erratic rainfall. The food security crisis is further compounded by the country's high HIV prevalence rate (currently estimated at around one quarter of the adult population). The Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee, led by the World Food Program (WFP), estimated in April 2003 that 5.5 million Zimbabweans (nearly half of the total population of 11.6 million) will need food assistance in the July 2003 to June 2004 agricultural year. To meet these needs, WFP has appealed to international donors for 452,900 metric tons (mt) of food, less carryover stocks from last year of 106,815 mt, for a total net new requirement of 346,085 mt. A revised vulnerability assessment is tentatively scheduled for December 2003, but WFP has already informally advised post that the total number of Zimbabweans requiring food assistance may rise, resulting in WFP increasing its appeal to donors.

3. To date, virtually all international food assistance to Zimbabwe has been distributed in communal areas, rural parts of the country populated almost exclusively by black Zimbabweans and organized with traditional village structures of chiefs and headmen. WFP, through its implementing partner (IP) non-governmental organizations (NGOs), is providing food assistance in communal areas in 47 of the country's 57 rural districts. The USAID-funded C-SAFE program, a consortium of World Vision, CARE and Catholic Relief Services, is covering 9 rural districts; and Save the Children/UK covers the remaining rural district with funding from Great Britain's Department for International Development (DFID). The Government of Zimbabwe's (GOZ) food assistance is managed as a cash-for-

work program, under which able-bodied persons work on public works projects and receive cash with which to purchase food from the GOZ's Grain Marketing Board (GMB). Although the GMB imported substantial amounts of cereals for its cash-for-work program in the 2002/2003 agricultural season (estimated in excess of 700,000 mt), there are numerous, credible allegations that significant portions of these stocks were diverted from their intended purpose due to corruption and/or politicization. A number of these allegations are detailed in a recently issued Human Rights Watch report entitled "Not Eligible: The Politicization of Food in Zimbabwe."

14. The GOZ's land reform program is divided into two schemes: A1 and A2 (see reftel). Under the A1 land reform scheme, subdivided plots were redistributed to small-holder farmers with average plot sizes of around 30 hectares each. The August 2003 report of the Utete Land Commission found that 127,192 farmers were allocated a total of 4,321,080 hectares of land under the A1 scheme, contrary to earlier GOZ assertions of 300,000 farmers. Under the A2 scheme, 2,198,814 hectares were redistributed to "new commercial" large-scale farmers. According to the Utete Commission, only 7,260 farmers have taken up their farms under the A2 scheme, despite official claims of 54,000 beneficiaries. As described in reftel, the A2 scheme has been the subject of substantial controversy, with plots allocated on the basis of cronyism, and numerous violations of GOZ policy prohibiting multiple farm ownership and setting maximum plot sizes. Traditional village structures are absent in these former commercial farming areas, under either the A1 or A2 schemes. Our best information is that these areas are largely governed by hastily established political committees that include war veterans and other individuals who participated in the land invasions.

15. The only notable international assistance being provided in the newly resettled areas are efforts to feed and comfort former commercial farm workers who have become displaced (IDPs) by the GOZ's fast-track land reform program. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) recently started a program to assist IDPs with funding from USAID/OFDA and possible additional funding from the Swedes. DFID is implementing a similar, small-scale program through a local NGO called the Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe (FCTZ). Because donors, including the UN, have not been allowed unimpeded access to these newly resettled areas, and the GOZ has stonewalled for more than a year on the UN's attempts to conduct any type of comprehensive survey, there is no reliable data on the status of the former farm workers or the newly resettled farmers. Nonetheless, given the limited number of reported population movements, the UN estimates that 50-70% of commercial farm workers have likely remained on the farms where they were previously employed or on neighboring farms.

16. The UN believes that the former farm workers are among the most vulnerable population in Zimbabwe. Recent assessments by C-SAFE, SADC and Save the Children/UK suggest that food insecurity may be as prevalent in the newly resettled areas as in communal areas. Both populations are affected by hyperinflation and the general macro-economic deterioration, shortages of agricultural inputs, drought conditions, and inadequate draught power. While these assessments have not adequately quantified the food needs in resettlement areas, they have raised concern about increasing vulnerability that is not being addressed by international food assistance. Based on a desk study of these recent assessments, WFP estimates that 500-600,000 people in the newly resettled areas require food assistance. Absent reliable data, WFP's best guess is that 10-20% of this total vulnerable population consists of newly resettled A1 farmers (and their families), whereas 80-90% would be former farm workers (and their families) on both A1 and A2 land. This would mean that the vast majority of vulnerable people not being assisted in the newly resettled areas are former farm workers (and their families) who were victims of the GOZ's fast-track land reform program.

THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME'S PROPOSAL

17. On October 27, 2003, WFP wrote to the major international donors requesting their concurrence with a proposal to provide food assistance in the newly resettled areas. WFP proposes to pilot a small assistance effort at two food distribution sites in the newly resettled areas, using the same vulnerability criteria it uses in communal areas, to gather more reliable data on vulnerability and to test the waters to see if assistance can be provided in a transparent, non-political manner. WFP's request followed closely the

widely publicized release of a Human Rights Watch Report that criticized international donors for not allowing distributions in newly resettled areas. In addition to criticizing the GMB for political bias, corruption and lack of transparency, the Human Rights Watch Report asserts that international donors have politicized food aid by excluding vulnerable populations in the newly resettled areas from eligibility.

18. Devising an effective means of providing food assistance to the most vulnerable populations in the newly resettled areas, without giving support to Zimbabwe's failed land reform program, is a complex matter that raises a host of practical and policy concerns. Post has discussed these issues extensively with the European Union and the British High Commission (including DFID), both of whom have concerns similar to ours.

-- First, all major donors, including the U.S., have insisted that the nature and extent of vulnerability in the resettled areas must be established before feeding programs can be authorized, as is ordinarily the case in humanitarian assistance programs. Because donors have not been allowed unimpeded access to these areas, it has not been possible to assess the degree and extent of food insecurity.

-- Second, the GOZ's failure to disclose the level and coverage of GMB food distributions in the resettled areas, or any of its projected food imports, has prevented proper planning and coordination. Primary responsibility for feeding Zimbabweans must rest with the GOZ and it is important that international donors not fill every gap, which would alleviate the GOZ of its fair share of the burden.

-- Third, the absence of traditional village structures in the newly resettled areas means that WFP's current methods for beneficiary selection/registration and food distribution could not be used to ensure a transparent and non-political program. Because of the continued presence in the newly resettled areas of persons who employed violence and/or intimidation to acquire land, more stringent methods would have to be used to guarantee that assistance programs remain non-partisan. In particular, so as not to reward lawlessness or bail out the GOZ's disastrous land reform program, special precautions would have to be taken to exclude from beneficiary lists those who engaged in acts of violence, intimidation or the illegal occupation of land.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES TO WFPs PROPOSED FOOD ASSISTANCE IN
NEWLY RESETTLED AREAS

19. Option 1: Inform WFP that the US cannot consider contributing to a new program in the newly resettled areas until existing programs have been adequately resourced. To date, WFP has received pledges for only 43% of its total net appeal of 346,085 mt. The current appeal only contemplates assistance in the communal areas. Expanding its program to cover the newly resettled areas, to feed an estimated vulnerable population of 500-600,000, would require additional resources. Moreover, WFP expects soon to conclude a vulnerability assessment for urban areas, which have also experienced increased food insecurity, necessitating even more resources. The lack of clarity regarding expected GOZ food imports and uncertainty concerning pledges from other major donors (such as the South Africans) make it difficult for WFP or the donors to plan for an expansion of food assistance efforts. This option would, in effect, postpone a decision on the issue until WFP could provide adequate information on its total resource needs and expected contributions from other donors. By deferring the decision, however, this option would unnecessarily delay responding to vulnerable people in the newly resettled areas, most of whom are believed to be innocent former farm workers.

110. Option 2: Allow WFP to provide targeted assistance in newly resettled areas with resources other than those contributed by the U.S. government. Under this option, we would inform WFP that we would raise no objections to a targeted food assistance program in newly resettled areas that is done in a transparent and non-partisan manner, using non-USG resources. This option would require WFP to obtain additional resources from other donors to carry out the proposed assistance, which WFP believes may be possible. One potential contributor would be South Africa (although post has not fully explored this with the South African High Commission). South Africa provided approximately 58,000 mt of cereals through WFP for the 2002/2003 season, but has not yet pledged assistance for the 2003/2004 season. As South Africa is reportedly considering providing its 2003/2004

assistance through the GMB, which would be of significant concern to many donors, an additional advantage of this option is that it could encourage South Africa to continue providing its resources through WFP. Although this option side steps many of the issues, due to the complexities and political sensitivities entailed in the other options, it may allow for the swiftest response to increasing vulnerability in the newly resettled areas. This option, however, would represent a significant departure from the traditional approach to managing international humanitarian assistance programs. The U.S. and other donors ordinarily subscribe to an entire humanitarian assistance effort and do not attempt to "wall off" parts of the assistance program with which they have concerns. Unsubscribing to part of the food assistance effort in Zimbabwe would potentially set a bad precedent, could expose us to public criticism and would weaken our negotiating position with WFP and other donors regarding the management and oversight of the overall food assistance program.

11. Option 3: Allow WFP to pilot a food assistance effort at two distribution sites in A1 newly resettled areas, subject to stringent conditions and additional assurances to satisfy the donor concerns described in paragraph 8. WFP has consistently maintained that it cannot in good conscience do a survey to assess vulnerability in the newly resettled areas without being prepared to provide food assistance because the vulnerability assessments in and of themselves raise community expectations. This option would enable WFP to begin food distributions on a trial basis, gather more reliable data on vulnerability, and test the waters to see if assistance can be provided in a transparent, non-political manner. WFP and its NGO implementing partners would select the pilot sites based on preliminary information regarding need and the amenability of local authorities to the program. Under this option, prior to commencing assistance, WFP would have to assure donors that it has:

- (a) obtained a guarantee from the GOZ of unimpeded access to the newly resettled areas (to assess the nature and extent of food insecurity, to select and register a targeted group of the most vulnerable beneficiaries, and to effect and monitor food distributions);

- (b) developed a plan for management of the beneficiary selection/registration and food distribution processes that puts its implementing partner NGOs in full control, rather than politically created committees, and specifies how they will respond when problems inevitably arise (including procedures for the immediate suspension of distributions);

- (c) clarified the criteria for beneficiary selection, taking into account the unique circumstances of the former commercial farming areas, to target food distribution to the most vulnerable while excluding from eligibility perpetrators of violence, intimidation or illegal acts (such as illegal land occupations); and

- (d) obtained a commitment from the GOZ/GMB to coordinate distributions, including a commitment to provide information regarding GMB import and distribution plans.

Post proposes to communicate these conditions to WFP in a letter responding to its request. The letter would also specify that this must be a phased approach, allowing the US and other major donors to evaluate the pilot effort thoroughly before agreeing to any expansion to other A1 areas or to A2 areas. Post also proposes to allow WFP to commence immediately therapeutic and wet feeding programs to the most vulnerable in newly resettled areas, without any need for further assurances.

12. If adopted, option 3 would effectively respond to the concerns outlined in paragraph 8. This option, however, may be difficult to implement because the GOZ may not agree to the conditions without protracted negotiations. If the GOZ does agree, it could be difficult to identify persons to be excluded from eligibility due to their past participation in violence, intimidation or illegal acts. We would have to be prepared to accept the possibility that some such individuals may slip through the cracks of any system we devise and receive food aid. Moreover, making such distinctions could become divisive and exacerbate tensions within already fragile communities. This option could also leave the US open to criticism that we have excluded individuals from eligibility for humanitarian assistance on grounds other than need. We would have to be prepared to respond publicly to such criticism that we are taking a principled position of not rewarding violence and lawlessness, while trying to respond effectively to the humanitarian needs of the innocent victims of the GOZ's chaotic land reform program.

